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# INTRODUCTION

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This book is intended for students in training, or for young teachers of English in any department of the school who have not yet found their feet. In the variety of the work which is suddenly thrust upon them when they enter the schools, their greatest difficulty is to find a path through the work, and see the ideal to which it leads. How often young teachers are worried with the question: "Is this the right way?" When they know, or think they know, the method to follow, the rest is easy. *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.* Believing as I do that nothing is so important as to set out in the right direction—that once they have their foot on the right road the future is their own—I have attempted to set up an ideal in the teaching of poetry, and to indicate lines of approach.

I have chosen this subject, because, if I have anything to say worth saying on the method of teaching English, it is on this department of the work, and if I fail here I need go no further. In it I have spent many of the happiest hours of my life, and hope to

spend many more. I think, at times, of Shaw's epigram: "Those who can, do: those who cannot, teach." If we could write poetry no doubt we would do so, and leave the teaching to others. If we only love poetry, but cannot write it, then we teach. Yes, but teaching is also doing, and it is because I have felt that in teaching poetry I was, in the fullest sense, doing, that I have found it so satisfying. "Life's inadequate to joy, as the soul sees joy," says Cleon. Teach a poem, as it should be taught, and see the flash in your pupils' eyes as the living beauty of the poem goes home to their hearts, and you will find that life is adequate to joy. Certainly, at the end of a lesson on poetry, Shaw's epigram has seemed to me merely a clever futility. He never knew the teacher's joy in doing.

But there is another reason for beginning with poetry. If I had to test a teacher of English by his work in any one branch of the subject I would choose this. It is the highest work he has to do, that which demands most of him. If he can teach poetry he can teach any other department of the subject if he will; but he may teach other departments of the subject well and fail with poetry.

We hear frequently the complaint that modern education seems to lead nowhere, that much of the money spent upon it is simply wasted. The taxpayer looks for a fair return for his money, and, when he fails to find it, condemns education as not being sufficiently practical. This opens up a big question which

I do not mean to tackle. But I wish to state that I aim at treating my subject in an entirely practical way. It seems to me that poetry ought to be taught in a practical manner, that so taught it will give the taxpayer an abundant return for his money, and that many of the methods used at present amply justify the complaints that are made. In saying this I know I am inviting criticism. As I have to deal with students entering the teaching profession, criticism will be most helpful. If my methods are wrong, the sooner I am told the better, for the methods suggested in this little book are those I strive to impress on the young teachers under my charge.

When I think of what I have written, I imagine two different classes of critics rising up against me—those who consider me a mere theorist, and those who object to my strictures on teachers. The former wish to know what practical experience, if any, I have, that I, a lecturer in a Training College, presume to speak. To these I offer the following summary of my practical experience: I was for four years a Pupil Teacher, and for five years an Elementary Teacher; I spent eight months teaching in a French High School, eight and a half years as Head of the English Department in a Secondary School, and nine and a half years as Headmaster of a combined School containing firstly, Higher Grade and Elementary Departments and, latterly, Higher Grade and Advanced Division.

The latter, on the other hand, urge that I have been too severe upon teachers, too ready to condemn. To

## INTRODUCTION

this I can but reply that the person who is most often in the dock is my past self, and that if I seem to condemn with confidence, it is because I feel confident that I know now where and why I failed in the past. I have written here what I imagine would have been useful to myself as a beginner, in the hope that it may help some other beginner.

# ON THE TEACHING OF POETRY

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PRACTICAL IN TEACHING

When we think of education and of much of the criticism passed upon it, we find that many of the faults in both spring from the same cause. We find teachers with no clear idea as to what they should aim at, employing methods for which they can give no real defence. Their work might be summed up in Pope's couplet:

“ And he, who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,  
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning.”

On the other hand we find critics with very definite ideas as to what they want from education, criticizing teachers and their product. Unfortunately the critics are often as far wrong as the teachers. They do not see that what they expect from the teacher is often

quite different from what the teacher has been asked to do. The teachers fail because they do not see clearly what they ought to aim at, and the critics fail because they do not see what the teachers ought to aim at. If the teachers do not know where they ought to be going, how can they ever arrive? And what are we to say of those who do not know where the teachers ought to be going, but criticize them for not arriving somewhere else? We are called a practical people, and so we blunder along.

It seems reasonable to ask that teachers should see clearly the reason for which a subject is included in the curriculum—the end to be attained—and should shape their teaching towards that end. They cannot begin to be practical until they know what is asked of them, in what way the subject is to advance the child's education. But if the end is an ideal and so unattainable, what then? All ends worth attaining are unattainable. The best part of humanity spend their lives striving for ideals which they know they will never attain. The man who has attained has not lived.

“ Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what 's a Heaven for?”

And so the teacher, to be practical, must strive by all the means in his power to attain the ideal. His success is to be measured—but who can measure it?—not by the nearness to the ideal which he attains, but by the height he lifts his pupils above the level on which they stood. I wish, then, to make this the test

for all methods; do they help towards that end for which the subject is made part of the child's education? If so, they are practical.

Why is poetry taught in schools? Poetry is an art, and the reason for including it in the curriculum can only be that we wish to develop the aesthetic sense, the feeling for beauty in our pupils. It is true that poetry does more than this; but not only is the desire to develop this love of the beautiful the main reason for teaching it in school, but if poetry is to do more for us, it will do so only in proportion as we feel its beauty. Poetry is not only beautiful; it is also true to life. In it "Beauty is truth", and in it, as in all art, we attain to truth through beauty. If we could develop this sense in our pupils so that when they left us they would turn, naturally, toward the beautiful in all things—in sound and sight, in thought and deed—we should have attained one of the great ends of education and our pupils would remake this world of ours, for no people with a sense for the beautiful would tolerate the hideous sights and sounds and slums of our great cities. Our social reformers may strive as they will to lift the people, but they are the first to admit that though much may be done by improving external conditions, the only cure is to educate the people—to develop in them a love for better things. We cannot make a people clean in body, clean in thought and deed. But if we can develop in the people a desire for this, they will no longer tolerate filth. One of the practical methods of improving human life is to

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develop the children's powers of appreciation of the beautiful. Poetry is one of a group of subjects that aim at this ideal, this development of the æsthetic sense, this joy in beauty. All teaching of poetry, to be practical, must foster this love of the beautiful.

## CHAPTER II

### QUALIFICATIONS OF THE TEACHER OF POETRY

It will be evident that the first qualification for the teacher of poetry is that he should love poetry—love the poetry he teaches. The teacher can communicate only what he feels. If the poem is dead to him, he cannot make it live to his pupils. It is true that some of his pupils, with a natural gift for poetry, may get home to the beauty of the poem in spite of his teaching. But to the normal pupil he will communicate his own feeling that the poem is a dead thing.

It may be argued that some people have no ear for poetry. That is quite true. Some people have no ear for music, and so they are not asked to teach music. But if they have an ear for music it can be trained. Just so in poetry. The man to whom poetry is dead should not be asked to do what he cannot do. But there are few such people. The great majority of people have some power of appreciating poetry when it is read to them by one who feels it. The teacher's duty is to develop this power. He must give up the idea that the passing of any examination qualifies him to teach

a subject. The subject must live in him if he is to teach it, and it must go on living in him if he is to continue teaching it.<sup>1</sup> What are we to say of the teacher who makes of the poem an intelligence lesson, or who spends his time over historical, geographical and biographical details, over classical allusions, derivations and figures of speech, so that the pupils get everything except the poetry? Simply, that the poem does not live for him. It is dead to him, evidently, for his only interest lies in dissecting it. If it lived for him the details would live also and find their true place in his work.

That the subject may continue living he must continue reading. When he lets his own reading drop, thinking he knows enough for his work, and trusting to his accumulated stores, he not only ceases to advance—he begins to go back. There can be no standing still. Life means development and change. Rest is the beginning of death and decay. True, he may know enough for all he has to teach. It is not knowledge we are asking for, but the fire of life, that freshness, that zest for the work which can be found only in him in whom the subject lives. Is it much to ask? That depends on how he regards his work. The curse of our profession is that it forms an easy option for the slackers—those who will not work anywhere, but who

<sup>1</sup> "But," I may be asked, "how do you expect a teacher to keep living all the subjects in the Elementary curriculum?" I do not expect him to do so. I doubt if any teacher can. To me it seems simply absurd that one person should be expected to take all the subjects of a class.

get here a sure place and a salary they never could earn in the open market. These are the slugs in the garden of education that feed upon the young plants and stunt their growth, and until a higher standard of character is demanded we shall still find them there; for character, and not the acquired knowledge which goes at the present day by the name of education—as if knowledge were education—is the most important thing in the teacher. One thinks with envy of Peroo, the Lascar, in *The Bridge Builders*, with his worship of the great Kashi bridge then in process of being built, and his method of dealing with slackers—"He controlled his own gang of tacklemen—mysterious relatives from Kutch Mandvi gathered month by month and tried to the uttermost. No consideration of family or kin allowed Peroo to keep weak hands or a giddy head on the pay-roll. 'My honour is the honour of this bridge,' he would say to the about-to-be-dismissed. 'What do I care for your honour? Go and work on a steamer. That is all you are fit for.'"

To me the teaching profession is the finest in the world, and the "Long Trail" of education one that merits all that Kipling says. It is "the old trail"—the trail of all life in all the ages, the trail of education of the young for the life that lies before them. It is "our own trail", for we have made it ours, we have chosen it as the one thing in life worth doing—the trail on which we look to find the joy of living. Let there be no mistake about this. If life is to be more than mere existence we must give our hearts to something and

seek it through life whatever it costs. Poet and metaphysician agree in this.

"In every man's career are certain points  
Whereon he dares not be indifferent,  
The world detects him clearly, if he dare,  
As baffled at the game, and losing life.

• • • • •  
We let him choose upon his own account  
So long as he's consistent with his choice.  
But certain points, left wholly to himself,  
When once a man has arbitrated on,  
We say he must succeed there or go hang.  
Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most  
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—  
For he can't wed twice Then, he must avouch,  
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,  
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,  
Whate'er the process of conviction was:  
For nothing can compensate his mistake  
On such a point, the man himself being judge:  
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul."<sup>1</sup>

"The man whose nature is such that by one path alone his chief desire will reach consummation, will try to find it on that path, whatever it may be, and whatever the world thinks of it; and, if he does not, he is contemptible. Self-sacrifice is too often the 'great sacrifice' of trade, the giving cheap what is worth nothing. To know what one wants, and to scruple at no means that will get it, may be a harder self-surrender."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BROWNING, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*.

<sup>2</sup> F. H. BRADLEY, *Appearance and Reality*.

" Let a man contend to the uttermost  
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!"<sup>1</sup>

To the mere man the trail of the woman who keeps house appears one of endless monotony, of wearisome ever-recurring details that must be looked to, where "creature-comforts" seem almost the aim and end of existence. Yet when he sees what his wife makes of this trail, how to her the golden thread of love can link up all into a unity, how to her the details are seen in the light of her love for her own, he stands ashamed of his own littleness. Can we not make the same of our own trail? For our trail is also "the out trail". If one of the great ends of education is to develop character, who will set bounds to our trail which leads out into the mystery of human life, out to the limits of human character, if there be such? This land of developing human character, through which we have to travel, makes our trail "the trail that is always new". The more experience we have, the more wonderful becomes this land—a land where nothing ever is the same. The power for good or evil, for joy or sorrow, which lies in the hands of teachers they only at times realize, and when they do realize it the responsibility is almost too great to be borne. Teaching brings home to a man his own littleness, as it opens up to him the power and possibility of his work. When he sees before him what he might do, what could be done, he realizes that on his trail, if on any, "men bulk big", and never

<sup>1</sup> BROWNING, *The Statue and the Bust.*

does he feel more keenly how big his own life might be than at the end of some lesson into which he has been pouring the living energy of his soul. The children go out and he returns to his little ordinary self, but with the feeling that for that hour at least he has lived. Those who have never taught may understand when I say that the effect is similar to that of reading a fine poem—say the great speech of Caponsacchi in *The Ring and the Book*. I have thus described the effect elsewhere:—“As we read we are one with him; the glory and the purity of his love for Pompilia is ours, his strength and weakness ours, his suffering ours; we take up his cross, but feel also all the glory of his martyrdom and we return to our little selves humbled and dissatisfied, but full of aspiring hope.”<sup>1</sup>

To be entrusted with the work of teaching is a privilege which brings with it a great responsibility—the responsibility of keeping oneself ever fit for the work. How many of the children, in poetry, for instance, depend entirely on what they get from their teachers! It can be a beautiful thing, a joy, a power for good in their lives, or it can be a dead thing, a weariness, a waste of time. For the majority of the children the choice lies with the teacher. The child stands waiting to enter the land of poetry, and it lies with the teacher to lead the way. It is generally admitted that in nothing is our country greater than in its poetry. Is not this—our greatest contribution to the world of art—the finest training ground for our

<sup>1</sup> *The Ring and the Book as a Connected Narrative*, p. 113.

## CHAPTER III

### CHOICE OF THE POEM

The young teacher is often at a loss as to what poem to take for a lesson. The difficulty is practically always due to the fact that he is looking at poems from the wrong point of view. He may be looking for one which will give him an opportunity of showing his power of questioning, or for one which will test the intelligence of the class, or even for one with a good moral. All these things are quite beside the point. If you are going to teach a poem, the poem is the thing, not your power of questioning; the success of your lesson is to be measured by the joy your pupils find in it, and your questioning is quite out of place unless it is contributing to this. Poems are not intelligence tests, though they are sometimes used as such; and good poems do not have morals. The choice would be much easier if the teacher would say to himself: "Which of the poems I really care for would suit this class?" The rule, then, should be—choose a poem from your own anthology. Have you made no anthology for yourself? Why have you not done so? There are many anthologies, I know; and these will help. But

in love we must choose for ourselves. We cannot love because others love. The anthologies may put before us all the beautiful poems of our literature; but, unless we are specially gifted, we will love only a certain number. These form our anthology. It may be argued that a good poem is good in itself. Yes, but not necessarily good for me. That, of course, would mean my failure and my loss, but we all have our limitations. It is no uncommon thing to find the real lover of Shelley blind to the beauties of Wordsworth, or to find lovers of modern poetry who cannot read *Paradise Lost*. It is true that we ought to try to develop our powers of appreciation, and that we can do so. But when we have done our best we still have our limitations. These limitations bound our anthology, and most of us have but to read straight through an anthology to find them. If the student has been properly taught in school he will be well on the road towards making an anthology before he reaches the Training College. But education in school is so often side-tracked, if not absolutely lost sight of, in examinations that it is quite common to find students afraid to trust their own taste—students who will readily write an appreciation of a poet, but who cannot quote their favourite lines from his poems. They know the accepted criticism of the poet much better than his poetry. This is, of course, the natural result of examinations in poetry. I do not wish to discuss here the whole question of examinations, though it is my experience that those who know most about them

despise them most. Certainly the man who is truly measured by an examination must be a "poor stick", but it is the rough and ready way of the world, and we have the reply to it in Browning's—

" But all, the world's coarse thumb  
And finger failed to plumb,  
  
This, I was worth to God."

As the rough and ready way of the world, its success varies with the department of a subject to which it is applied. Thus, while it may get fair results in testing our knowledge of English, it not only fails entirely when it attempts to test our power of appreciating poetry, but develops just what it wishes to discourage—the getting up of criticisms and suitable quotations. The examination becomes the thing, and it is all-important to know what the teacher or the accepted critic or the professor says about the poem, not what the heart says. Yet the aim of teaching poetry is to develop the æsthetic sense, the joy in beauty. We have heard that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread". When you have taught a poem you love, and seen that light in your pupils' eyes which is the teacher's best reward, you will know that you have reached depths "deeper than did ever plummet sound". It is true that the knowledge of what critics have said is often of the greatest help to us, opening our eyes to new beauties in the poem; but we must never forget that, when all has been said, what we feel about the poem is the

final truth about the poem for us. Hence the necessity, for the teacher, of making his own anthology. As I have said before, the teacher can communicate only what he feels. He may know many things about a poem and these he may teach as facts, but he cannot "get them across" unless he feels them: unless they come straight from his own heart, they never will reach the hearts of his pupils. In teaching poetry, the first and most important thing we have to do is to make the poem live to the pupils: that is, we must first make them glad in the beauty of the poem, and all further teaching of the poem must tend to deepen that gladness. Our first aim must be to make them feel, not to make them know—to make them love the beautiful thing, and then to deepen that love through understanding.

"One cardinal fact about great poetry, as about great philosophy, the very secret, perhaps, of what is called their immortality, is that their main value lies in a process, not in a result. . . . We do not understand a great poem till we have felt it through, and as far as possible re-created in ourselves the emotions which it originally carried."<sup>1</sup> If this is so the teacher must choose his poem from his own anthology. This it seems to me indicates clearly one of the duties of the English Department in a Training College. Here, at least, the student may be encouraged to read and choose for himself, encouraged to trust his own taste. All unconsciously, too, he may be led to develop his taste as

<sup>1</sup> PROFESSOR G. MURRAY, *The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Literature*.

we suggest new lines of reading and new points of view, or bring other poems before him as candidates for inclusion in his anthology. Once he begins to choose for himself he is on the right road. He is beginning to read and enjoy poetry for its own sake, beginning to listen to his own heart. He will have something to teach. He may even lead his pupils to choose for themselves. If I am told that the time allowed for English in our Training Colleges, two periods of fifty minutes each per week, is hopelessly inadequate for such work, I can but say that I know it all too well; but if we wait till sufficient time is allocated to the subject, we shall wait. Nothing is to be gained by waiting. Only by trying it can we make our need felt, only by making our need felt can we hope to get it satisfied.

In choosing from your anthology, have some faith in your pupils. Certain classes of poems are clearly unsuitable for young children. Obscurity of language, or difficulty in the thought or sentiments expressed, rule them out. But the child's power of appreciation is far greater than many teachers think, and there is a freshness and keenness in their joy, in their discovery of a new and beautiful thing, before which our more mature appreciation sometimes pales. How often does the teacher, in his attempt to get down to the level of the children, get far below it. Let him aim rather at lifting the pupils to his own level. It is true that there may be things in the poem which they cannot appreciate fully. Which of us enjoys Milton

or Shakespeare fully? Yet we venture fearlessly, knowing that, though we will never attain to the full appreciation, "their main value lies in a process, not in a result"—in an ever deepening sense of the beauty and truth to be found in them, and to be found in them only by a more careful, more faithful study of the word. If you love the poem, forward with it, then! Do not hesitate about it, or you will fail before you begin. You must not approach the class in a hesitating way. Your own confidence in the poem creates the very atmosphere wanted. My own experience is that the pupils always seemed capable of rising to any level I wished—when I really wished it.

The teacher should always remember that in his class there are probably minds greater than his own—spirits which will travel farther than his farthest. We have all recognized this at times, but how often must it be the case though we do not perceive it? Are we to come down to their level? Is it not a question whether we can rise to theirs? We shall be safe at least if we always aim at lifting the class to our level, striving always to give them the best we have to give. Many a time we gain our deepest insight into a poem when thus teaching it to a class. The very effort seems to give life to our own imaginations and lift us above ourselves.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOW TO INTRODUCE THE POEM

All is now ready for our lesson, but there is still one question to answer. How shall we introduce the poem to our pupils? To me, most introductions amount to distrust, either of the poet or of the pupils; and I would have you trust both. But let us look at some of the methods of introducing a poem.

Some have merely to be mentioned to be rejected.

- (1) The *biographical*, for instance, in which we introduce the poem by giving a short life of the poet, and, perhaps, an account of how he came to write this poem. This will be in place when the pupils know the poem and are interested in the poet. His importance for them lies in the very fact that he wrote this poem. Give them the poem, and then they will be ready to hear and remember what you wish to tell them about the poet. But remember that biography is not poetry —that what you have to teach at present is the poem, and that the details of the poet's life are absolutely out of place in this lesson unless they contribute directly to the pupil's joy in the poem.

"What porridge had John Keats?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BROWNING, *Popularity*.

You will find that you have quite sufficient to do in teaching the poem. Get it done in the time, before you are interrupted. How often the lesson is left unfinished, because the teacher had not the sense to go straight to the poem, but must needs thrust himself between the poet and the pupils! All that you have to say can wait till the children have heard what the poet has to say; and if, after hearing him and being happy with him, there is no time for your remarks, do not worry. You set out to teach a poem, and you have taught it. The children can well afford to wait for your remarks if they have had the poet's.

Another method of introducing the poem we may call the *explanatory*. It takes various forms. Sometimes it consists in putting on the board a list of the words which the pupils may find difficult. This, of course, makes the words doubly difficult, as they are now out of their context. It is my experience that, if the poem is read to the class, and the pupils are getting the spirit of it, most of them will divine the meaning of the words from the context. And is not this the best way for a child to learn a new word—to meet it properly used, i.e. in its proper context, and so to divine its meaning, then to have his interpretation of the word confirmed or corrected as need be? It is probable that he will remember that word for the future in the context in which he first met it. What better context could there be? It may be objected that the child cannot get the spirit of the poem

if he is not understanding it fully. No one understands a poem fully at a first reading—no, nor at a second nor a third. Why expect it then from a child? If the vocabulary is so difficult as, for instance, in some of Burns's poems, that the pupils will fail to get the spirit of the poem, the poem is too difficult for the class, and requires exceptional treatment. In this case, we must give the words either at the beginning or in the process of reading. Again, the explanatory introduction sometimes consists in giving a sketch of the story, a sort of line to follow through the poem. This is in place only with poems too difficult, either in thought or expression, for the class, as in some of Browning's short poems. Here, unless we give some help, we find that the first reading fails altogether of effect, as the pupils get nothing. This again is an exceptional case, and likely to occur only with advanced pupils. In all other cases the poet should be allowed to tell his own tale. He can do it best. But perhaps the worst form of this method is that in which the teacher warns the class of the good things coming, telling them to note the effect of this line or word, of that description or figure of speech. Let the child have the poem fresh: let him gather his own little garland and have the joy of discovering for himself. How else can we train his taste? The pupils ought to be allowed to look straight at the poem with an unbiassed mind, that it may have its own effect upon them. They should hear it twice at least before any criticism of any kind is passed. In his teaching after-

wards it is for the teacher to make sure that they have missed none of its beauties. He will probably be astonished at the amount they have found for themselves. This is just what he ought to encourage most, this power of feeling and perceiving for themselves.

A third form of introduction is to try to give the proper atmosphere or setting for the poem, and so prepare the child's mind to receive it. The intention seems to me good, and this method is employed by many good teachers of poetry. Afraid lest the children should miss the beauty of the poem, they try to awaken in them the spirit of expectancy. But why fear? This seems to me lack of faith in the poet or the pupils. Take as an example, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. If you read the poem, your voice, your manner of reading, will awaken the pupils to attention, and they will get the atmosphere at once from the poem. You cannot give it as Keats does. He does it perfectly. But note also that in giving the atmosphere you have robbed the poem of part of its freshness. Let the pupils have the joy of discovering themselves in the land of faery, and of forming their own first impressions of it. You have something to give them, I know, but there will be a time for that. Meanwhile Keats waits to speak to your pupils and you have to introduce him. If he were there in person, would you be long about the matter? Have you not often heard long-winded chairmen introducing an important speaker, while the audience sat impatiently, wishing he would

get done and let the speaker speak? Once again I say: "I have faith in the poet and in your pupils, and go straight to the poem."

Lastly, I would refer to a method, sometimes called the *synthetic*, in which, by means of an ingenious series of questions, the teacher appears to draw the poem from the class. "Appears", I say, because it is evident that you cannot draw a poem, say of Wordsworth, from a class of children. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*. The poem is not in them, but, if I may so put it, in the teacher—and so in his questions, and in his selection of the answers given to these questions. Let it be admitted at once that some poems can be so treated. Let it be admitted also that this method demands great ingenuity and skilful questioning on the part of the teacher, and that the whole can form a most attractive show lesson. There is no reason why the teacher should not exercise himself in this way occasionally, if he pleases, so long as he does not call this teaching poetry. This method is merely an introduction to a poem; and, be it noted, an introduction where none is needed, as the poems which can be treated thus are simple enough to be read to the class. I say "merely an introduction to the poem", as the class does not know the poem beforehand, or what becomes of the method? Nor have they the words of the poem before them, as these are to be drawn from them; and when they have been drawn from them and written down, still they have not the poem, for a poem is not a written thing, but sound, and it does not exist for the class till

they have heard it read and so felt the music and beauty of it. All the questioning and building that go to the drawing of the poem from the class, are merely an exhibition of the teacher's skill, not an exhibition of the beauty of the work of art. Until the children have the work of art before them, how can they feel its beauty or the beauty of its parts? One can appreciate the beauty of every line in a fine drawing: yes, but it is the beauty of the line *in the drawing*. Its beauty lies in what it contributes to the work of art. It has little or no beauty in itself. Take some of the greatest lines in our literature.

"Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir."

Here, Professor Bradley says, we are on "the topmost peaks of poetry". Yet the line apart from its context is nothing. Is there any more profoundly moving line in Wordsworth than

"And never lifted up a single stone,"

or in Shelley than

"Now  
We shall not do it any more"

yet what are they apart from their context?

But, I need not labour the point. If we wish to develop the æsthetic sense and lead our pupils to find beauty for themselves, how can we do it but by giving them the poem, reading it to them till they know it, and then dealing with what they have? If it is a poem

or play it on some instrument, or long for an orchestra, that he may really hear it? In the same way, nothing is more common among lovers of poetry than reading it aloud to themselves. If the poem is an old favourite, it is repeated aloud that they may get the full luxury of the music. If the poem is new, it must be read aloud that they may hear every tone of it. They will not trust to their imagination. Our debt to the printing press is great—so great that it is vain to try to measure it—but it has not all been gain, and one of the losses to the people in general is that they no more hear the voice of poetry. In the old days the poet chanted his poems to the people, and the people loved them. Everywhere he was a welcome guest, one received with honour: no feast or gathering was complete without him, and he was called by the high name of *ποιητής*—a maker, a maker of music, a poet, or, in our old Scots dialect, a “makar”. But now the poets are silent, the poems are hidden in books, and the people love them no longer, for they cannot hear them. But gather them together and read them your favourite poems and the old love will awaken. So it is with our pupils. They are but beginners in poetry. They do not know that it is music. They cannot read it. If I were asked: “How can the teacher best help the normal child to understand a poem?” I would answer: “By reading the poem aloud to him.” What has the teacher to say about the poem comparable with what the poet himself will say, if the pupil can but hear him? I know that you will find children who

read poetry for themselves, but they form a small percentage. For the great majority the poem does not exist until it is read aloud. The printed words convey little meaning to them, because they have not heard the beauty of sound and rhythm they contain. Yet in teaching a poem, this reading aloud that the children may hear is the part most often neglected, or the importance of which is most completely misunderstood. In teaching a new poem, some teachers get the children to read it aloud, one verse each. Now, an experienced reader of poetry cannot read a poem aloud at first sight. How can he? He has not felt it. Let me repeat what Professor Murray says: "We do not understand a great poem till we have felt it through, and as far as possible re-created in ourselves the emotions which it originally carried." He must understand the poem in this sense before he can read it. What then is the child to make of one verse, the whole meaning of which may depend on what has gone before, and how are the pupils to get the beauty of the poem from such reading, and what are we to think of the teachers who thus present a new poem to their pupils? Bad as this is, it is not much worse than the performance of some teachers when they read the poem aloud. It is evident at once, from the perfunctory manner in which it is read, that the reading is considered a simple thing of little importance—a thing that requires no preparation, that is done apparently merely to make sure that the pupils get the words, not to make sure that they get the poem. Can it be said that these

teachers know they are dealing with a work of art, and an art that appeals to the ear? If so, their reading is an impertinence, a wanton insult to the poem. But note, having read the poem once, they plunge into the teaching of it, as if it were their teaching that mattered, not their reading. What is it that matters? Well, if you are teaching a poem, I should say it is the poem that matters, and the poem is not there, in the books before the children, but exists for them while it is read. The important thing is that the children should get the poem. How can they get the poem from one perfunctory careless reading? If they are to understand it they must first feel it, and this requires time. To hurry on to teach a poem before the children have had time to form their own impressions shows entire ignorance of the purpose for which poetry is taught. If we wish to develop the æsthetic sense, to train the children to find the beauty in a poem, and so to enable them to read and appreciate poetry for themselves, we must give them time to form their own impressions, we must encourage them to do so, and try to make them understand that what they feel about the poem is the truth about it for them. Certainly we must try to guide them; but we do that to begin with by choosing the poem, and, secondly, when they have formed their impressions, by going over the poem and trying to show them new beauties, or to deepen their impressions of those they have discovered for themselves. Nothing is so important as to help the children to find the beauty for themselves—to give

them confidence that they may form their own impressions and not merely wait to be told what to feel. How are we to help them? By making sure that they get the poem before we have touched it. How are we to make sure that they get the poem? By reading the poem as we should read it.

We all remember the famous passage in the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus goes to consult the shades of the dead; how he digs the trench and pours a drink-offering to all the dead: "But when I had besought the tribes of the dead with vows and prayers, I took the sheep and cut their throats over the trench, and the dark blood flowed forth, and lo, the spirits of the dead that be departed gathered them from out of Erebus. Brides and youths unwed, and old men of many and evil days, and tender maidens with grief yet fresh at heart; and many there were, wounded with bronze-shod spears, men slain in fight with their bloody mail about them. And these many ghosts flocked together from every side about the trench with a wondrous cry, and pale fear gat hold on me . . . and myself I drew the sharp sword from my thigh and sat there, suffering not the strengthless heads of the dead to draw nigh to the blood."<sup>1</sup> One at a time they are allowed to drink of the blood; and then, and only then, can they speak, and give him the information he desires.

In his lecture on "The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Literature", Professor Mutray, referring to the

<sup>1</sup> *The Odyssey*, Book XI, translated by Butcher and Lang.

duty of the scholar to breathe his life into the spirits of the mighty dead that we may hear them speak, quotes from a German scholar: "We all know that ghosts will not speak till they have drunk blood, and we must give them the blood of our hearts." Let us imagine that the poem we are going to read is *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. The ghost of Keats stands waiting to speak to our pupils, but he cannot speak until he has drunk the blood of our hearts. What would we not give to make the poet live again! This cannot be, but we can hear his voice again, we can make his poem live, if we will but pour our life into it. You must live the poem while you read it. Voice-training and elocution are excellent helps, but they are nothing unless you live the poem. The emotions of the poem must thrill you and live in your voice. Is it the mystery of faery, or the wild joy of battle, the call of the sea or the hills, or the happy laughter of children? These must live in you. Can you not feel them? What do you suppose you are doing then when you read the poem? You think it a little thing to read a poem? It is a great thing, a heart-shaking thing, an uplifting, inspiring thing: it is life at its highest. It will try you to the uttermost, and leave you, at times, with quivering lips and eyes dimmed. And there are passages you will not dare to read aloud lest you break down. This it is to read a poem. You may have a poor voice, you may read badly, but if you are pouring your heart's blood into the poem it will carry across. It cannot fail. But there must be whole-

hearted devotion to the poem. You must not hesitate or hold back. You must give yourself to the poem without fear. "Love casteth out fear." This is the greatest thing you can do for your pupils in poetry—the greatest help you can give them. All your teaching and criticism are nothing beside this. To make a beautiful poem live to children, so that they are glad in its beauty, is to get right home to their hearts. Read the poem, and read it again and again, till they know it, and you will have accomplished the first and most important part of your duty—to make them love the beautiful thing. What more remains to do? To deepen that love through understanding.

## CHAPTER VI

### METHOD OF TEACHING THE POEM

"I am not here pleading for any mere enthusiasm or Schwärmerei, any enticing theory of short cuts by which you can reach 'the spirit' while neglecting 'the letter'. The letter is the road to the spirit, and it is only through the exactitudes of the letter that the spirit can be made visible. It is not less hard work that I am asking for: I almost fear it is more."<sup>1</sup>

I am frequently asked by students, "How should this poem be taught? What method ought I to employ?" My answer to this is simply that there is no definite method that ought to be employed; that it is like love-making—each must do it in his own way; and when they look disappointed I tell them that teaching poetry is like life, that we can lay down a few main principles that ought to be followed, but that the method of applying these principles varies with the class, the poem, and the teacher. This fact was driven home to me when first I began to watch students teach. On two or three occasions I had put down among my first

<sup>1</sup> PROFESSOR G. MURRAY, *The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Literature*, p. 21.

poem to the children, he has already done much to aid them in forming their impressions and has already contributed largely to them. If he has nothing further to contribute, nothing that will add to the child's joy in the beauty of the poem, he had better be silent and not spoil the good work he has done. But how often is this the case? If, however, we are anxious to give the utmost liberty to the child to form its own impressions, we can adopt the method of teaching the poems in groups. We may devote the whole period for poetry for one day to reading and re-reading three or four poems to the class and leave the teaching of these poems to another day. With Post-Intermediate pupils this often forms a most effective lesson. Read Keats's *Ode to Autumn*, then Shelley's *Wild West Wind*, Keats's *Nightingale*, then Shelley's *Skylark*. If you have really read them you have done a good period of work and the poems form such an excellent contrast that the impressions formed by the one help to bring out the impressions formed by the other.

That the matter may be put into form, let me suppose that the poem has been read. The children look up expectantly. How are we to begin? One thing we must try not to do. We must not dissipate the enthusiasm we have aroused by our reading. We must avoid, at all costs, making the teaching of the lesson an anti-climax to the reading. This is not easy, but if we keep it in mind it will help us to avoid the more serious faults. I would have the teacher go straight to the heart of the poem—that which set the poet writing; the

beautiful scene or story or idea. The poem is a unity. Treat it as one, not as a series of details. Do not begin at the beginning, and plod through, verse by verse, taking difficult words and figures of speech as they come. But go straight to the heart of the poem and let your teaching show how all the details contribute to the beauty of the unity. I cannot make this clear without an illustration. I shall take then the lesson I wrote for the *Educational Journal* four or five years ago on Wordsworth's *Daffodils*. Let us imagine that the poem has been read, twice at least, and the pupils look up. What more can we give them? The heart of the poem here is the scene and its effect on the poet. Get the scene then. Here I would point out that in getting the scene, the spirit must be one of friendly co-operation, the teacher and pupils working together to paint the scene. Do not question and correct the pupils as if you were testing their knowledge. Remember that they have got the atmosphere of the poem in the best way, from the poem itself, and that this atmosphere must pervade the lesson. I cannot emphasize too much the importance of this. As I said already, do not forget the purpose of your teaching, what you are aiming at doing. Voice, manner, everything must, as far as possible, be in harmony with this atmosphere. What hope to look for joy if we drive our pupils to it, shout at them, correct them and mock them for their mistakes! On the contrary, invite them to help you to paint the scene as Wordsworth saw it.

What did the poet see first? "A crowd, a host of

golden daffodils." Where were they? "Beside the lake, beneath the trees." How were they arranged beside the lake—in clusters or scattered about?

"They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay."

We have, then, the little bay in the lake and round its margin are trees and beneath them are the daffodils, not in clumps, but in never-ending line. Are we to imagine, then, a single line of daffodils? No! because that would not give the impression the poet gives of their great number. What expressions does he use to show the great number of the daffodils? A crowd, a host, ten thousand,

"Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way."

What is the Milky Way? Here the teacher describes the Milky Way, giving, if he wishes, the old Greek myth, and from the picture of the great belt of glimmering light stretching across the sky at night gets the picture of the daffodils stretched round the bay in a great golden belt. Do the daffodils shine and twinkle as the stars do? Yes, they shine, for Wordsworth says they are golden, and they twinkle, because they are fluttering in the breeze. Point out that this makes the simile perfect. (Details such as this, of course, will be taken or omitted according to the age of the class.) Is the picture complete now? No! the waves were dancing. There is our landscape; the bay of the

lake, with its dancing waves, and beneath the trees, stretching round the margin of the bay a great belt of shimmering golden daffodils. Is this the picture as Wordsworth saw it? We shall see later. The teacher now tells the children of Wordsworth's criticism of landscapes; how he declared he would think nothing of a landscape unless he could tell from it at once the season of the year and the kind of day. Having made sure that the children understand the meaning of the word landscape, put the position before them; suppose that opposite the school there was a green meadow, with a river flowing through it and with trees here and there, that would be a real landscape; now, if you had forgotten what season of the year it was, could you tell by looking out of the window at the landscape? Yes, by the trees and the grass and the flowers. Could you tell also what kind of day it was? Yes, you would see the sun shining or the rain falling or the wind blowing. How would you see the wind? You would see the branches of the trees swaying, and the grass and flowers bending, and ripples on the surface of the river. We agree, then, with Wordsworth in his criticism, and point out that this poem is just a landscape painted in words, and ask the children to apply his criticism to his own picture. Can you tell the season of the year? Frequently, at this point, the answer has come in a sort of triumphant shout: "Yes, Daffodils!" Having got the season of the year, can we tell the kind of day? It was windy. The daffodils were fluttering and dancing in the breeze and the waves were dancing.

Was the sun shining or was it cloudy? Here I have got the answer, "It was cloudy," and the line quoted, "I wandered lonely as a cloud," which gave an opportunity, not for checking the boy, and spoiling the good time we were having, and at the same time making him afraid to risk another answer, but for pointing out the difference between literal and figurative language, illustrating it from the figure we had already dealt with, "continuous as the stars that shine", and telling the boy not to forget the line he had quoted, as we would want it later. Do encourage your pupils to try! But we are still waiting to know whether the sun was shining or not. Now comes the answer, "Yes, the waves were sparkling." Is there anything else that makes you believe the sun was shining? Here I have never failed to get the answer, "a host of golden daffodils", and the information that daffodils are only really golden in the sunlight. We agree then that it was a breezy, sunny day, and point out how beautifully Wordsworth has brought the sunlight into his picture by the use of two words, *golden* and *sparkling*. (Much should be made of this according to the age of the pupils.) What about our picture; did we not forget the sunlight? Try here to make the children feel how great a difference would be made in our landscape by bringing in the sunlight, and get them to tell the various changes it would make—how it seems to make the landscape live. This will be important later. Is our picture now complete? Do we see now what the poet saw? We shall see later. We want now to discover

what was the effect of the scene upon the poet. To understand this we must try to get at the condition he was in, before he saw the picture. We turn to the boy who made the mistake, and ask him for his line: "I wandered lonely as a cloud." Here we are led at once to distinguish between being lonely and feeling lonely and conclude that Wordsworth was wandering along alone—dreaming, but not feeling lonely. (I am not forgetting the *Journal*, nor that Dorothy was with him. She was not with him in the poem.) So Wordsworth was wandering along alone, in a dreamy mood, when he saw this picture. Yes, but he saw something that we have not put into the picture. What have we missed? Here we must draw attention to the fact that to understand Wordsworth we must often take his words very literally. He says the daffodils are dancing and he means that they are happy, not that they look happy, but that they *are* happy, dancing for joy. The waves are dancing too, "but they outdid the sparkling waves in glee". And now the teacher puts the question, "Suppose I told you children that yesterday I was walking alone, dreaming, when I came upon a real jolly company, and that they were having such a good time and were so happy that I could not help rejoicing with them—what sort of company would you think I was talking about?" The answer comes at once: "A company of ladies and gentlemen, or boys and girls." But what does Wordsworth say?

"A poet could not but be gay  
In such a jocund company."

Now we get the meaning of jocund, and ask what company he refers to. "The daffodils." How, then, does he talk about the daffodils? "As if they were human beings." This answer I have had from a qualifying class—average age eleven. It could be drawn from much younger children. It contains the essence of Wordsworth's philosophy of nature, and it lies now with the teacher, according to the age of the children, to explain and expand this view, adding such lines as,

" And 'tis my faith that every flower  
Enjoys the air it breathes."

Now, what did Wordsworth see in the scene that we forgot to put into the picture? The answer comes, "That the daffodils were dancing." "But," the teacher replies, "we did put in that it was a windy day, and that the daffodils were fluttering in the breeze and that the waves were dancing." Then comes the answer, "He saw that they were happy, that they were dancing for joy." "Now," says the teacher, "suppose you were standing beside me looking at the class while I was explaining something, and all the faces were serious, when suddenly the door opened, the headmaster came in and announced that you were to get no home lessons to-night and a holiday to-morrow, can you imagine the smile of joy that would pass over the class and light up all the faces? When we painted this scene first, do you remember that we forgot to put in the sunlight and what a difference it made? Well, this is another kind of sunlight—what we might

call the sunlight of the mind or spirit, and this is the most beautiful thing that Wordsworth saw in the scene." Let us put that into our picture too. And what was the immediate effect upon him? " It filled him with joy." We now take the two lines,

" I gazed—and gazed—but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought,"

and ask what wealth means, and get at once: " Plenty of money." What does it mean here? " Plenty of happiness." Here we have the opportunity of dealing with the meaning of weal and its relation to wealth, comparing with heal and health, and pointing out that this is the best kind of wealth. The last verse shows the wealth he gained, and here if we wish we can point out the two lines contributed by his wife. We explain also the meaning of pensive, adding that this vacant or pensive mood strikes us as a repetition of the mood he suggests in the first line, and confirms the idea that he was not feeling lonely, but was wandering along dreaming. And now one last question. Have you noticed what is perhaps the most important idea in the poem as it occurs in each verse? and we gather the expressions,

- 1st verse, " *Dancing* in the breeze";
- 2nd verse, " *Tossing* their heads in sprightly *dance*";
- 3rd verse, " The waves beside them *danced*, but they  
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee";
- 4th verse, " And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And *dances* with the daffodils."

Yes, the daffodils dance for joy all through the poem, and Wordsworth's heart danced with them, and our hearts ought to dance with them too. I might add that in more advanced classes a very fine effect can be obtained here by reading to the pupils the following passage from Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal describing the same scene, and comparing it with the poem.

" 15th April, 1802.

" When we were in the woods beyond Gowbarrow Park we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. We fancied that the sea had floated the seeds ashore, and that the little colony had so sprung up. But as we went along there were more and yet more; and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and above them; some rested their heads upon these stones, as on a pillow, for weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing. This wind blew directly over the lake to them. There was here and there a little knot, and a few stragglers higher up; but they were so few as not to disturb the simplicity, unity, and life of that one busy highway."

Now let the teacher finish by reading the poem again.

that the poem as now understood may have its full effect on the pupils. It does not seem to me that the child's joy will have diminished any because of our teaching: it does seem to me that we have deepened and broadened the effect the poem had on him at first.

As I have said above, the method of applying the principles varies with the poem. Let me take another, one entirely different in character, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and attempt to show this. The heart of the poem here is the beauty of the story told, if I may so put it, in a succession of beautiful pictures—in the wonderful atmosphere of mystery and mediæval romance that broods over it, and in what Matthew Arnold would call the felicity of the diction in which it is told. Young children cannot appreciate this fully, I know; but who, save such another poet as Keats, could? Appreciation is a matter of degree. Take the poem you know best, write it out carefully in the form of a lesson, and at the end you will probably have discovered something new in it. Often as I have taught Wordsworth's *Daffodils*, and in spite of the fact that I had written it out carefully as a lesson some years ago for the *Educational Journal*, it was a real joy to work it out again, as I have done above, for in doing so, I discovered one or two new things that seemed to deepen my appreciation of the whole poem. Do not let us forget that "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever"—a spring that never runs dry. So long as we are living, developing, and, therefore, *changing* characters, so long must the poem have new beauties, new depths.

already impressed itself upon the pupils and that we must keep our teaching in harmony with it. (I may add that I shall deal more briefly with this poem than with the last.) We call upon the children now to help us to build up the various scenes of the poem. What have we in the first picture? A knight at arms. Get the full significance of "at arms". The rich armour is part of the colour of the picture, and we shall have something to say of it later. Where is he? Wandering alone by a lake. What time of the year is it? Late autumn. The sedge is withered, the birds are silent.

"The squirrel's granary is full,  
And the harvest's done."

What does the reference to squirrels suggest? That there are trees about. What is the squirrel's granary? Compare with the harvest. Both are preparations for the coming winter. Describe the knight. He is pale, haggard, woe-begone, his white brow moist with anguish, the colour gone from his cheeks. Though in armour, then, his visor is up. He is loitering by the lake. Why loitering? Is that better than wandering? Yes, because it makes clear that he is without hope. We loiter when we have nothing to do, nothing to look for. What kind of picture is this? Bare, silent, desolate, hopeless. What makes us feel it hopeless? The fact that even in his anguish the knight loiters by the lake. Were there any hope we could not use this word. What, in the time of the year, suggests the

flowers? Sweet-smelling flowers are shown by "fragrant zone". We explain zone and ask what season of the year we are in now. It is summer, and summer is the season of joy. Complete the picture. What did the knight do next?

"I set her on my pacing steed."

Note the effect of the word *steed*. Ask the children how the line would do thus—I set her on my pacing horse. Use here Ruskin's famous illustration from *Mazeppa*:

"Bring forth the horse! the horse was brought;  
In truth, he was a noble steed!"

and, as he suggests, re-write thus:

"Bring forth the steed! the steed was brought;  
In truth, he was a noble horse!"

In painting this scene I would let the children's imagination run free. For instance, I would ask what colour was the steed, and when they look to the poem I would add that they would not find the colour there, that they must suggest the colour. When they begin suggesting I would add, "But suppose we get the rest of the picture complete and that may help us." We have then the splendid steed, and on its back the faery's child with her long hair and the wild light in her eyes, and the beautiful fragrant flowers round her head, wrists, and waist. The knight walks holding the

bridle, his armour gleaming in the sunlight. Where does he look? Into her eyes.

"For sidelong would she bend, and sing  
A faery's song."

And is that all the scene? No, there is the background. It is summer and they walk through the green meadows under the trees. What colour shall we make the steed? Think of the lady, the faery's child, on its back, the shining armour of the knight, the rich trappings of the steed, and the background, the trees, the green meadows, the sunlight and all the rich colours of summer—and when the children are ready to dispute about the point we say: "Let each one decide for himself. Each of us must paint his own picture from a poem, and when the poet leaves us free, as in a point like this, we ought to choose for ourselves." And now take a moment to compare this scene with the first, that the children may feel how the contrast makes them stand out. In the first scene we have the knight, in his anguish, his armour as we now guess rusted. It is late autumn, cold, bare, withered, dead, hopeless, with an atmosphere of expectancy and mystery. Here the knight is in his strength, his armour gleaming, and here we have summer and warmth and colour and beauty and life and love, and over all the wild light from the eyes of the faery's child. For as the charm falls on him and he "nothing else saw all day long", so the charm falls on us and we pass into the land of faery. Thus it seems

later stage. I have taken them with pupils at all stages, and with students in the college. As a last example, let me take one that is a little more difficult in language and thought, and so more suitable for pupils over twelve years of age, and as we have had beauty of scene and beauty of story, let us take this time beauty of idea. I shall take *Death the Leveller*, by Shirley, and merely sketch a method, with little reference to details; and as this poem is not quite so well known I quote it.

### DEATH THE LEVELLER

(*James Shirley, 1596-1666*)

"The glories of our blood and state  
Are shadows, not substantial things;  
There is no armour against Fate;  
Death lays his icy hand on kings:  
    Sceptre and Crown  
    Must tumble down,  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crookèd scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,  
And plant fresh laurels where they kill:  
But their strong nerves at last must yield;  
They tame but one another still:  
    Early or late  
    They stoop to fate,  
And must give up their murmuring breath  
When they, pale captives, creep to death

The garlands wither on your brow;  
Then boast no more your mighty deeds!  
Upon Death's purple altar now  
See where the victor-victim bleeds.

Your heads must come  
To the cold tomb:  
Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust."

Once again, the poem having been read and re-read, the pupils look up. We direct them to the name of the poem and ask, "Why is Death called a leveller?" and pass to the distinction between shadows and substantial things. I have generally found this a most interesting point to get. We ask "What are 'the glories of our blood and state'?" When we get such answers as: "A kingdom", "A large estate", "Wealth", and ask if these are shadows, we frequently, from boys at least, get an emphatic "No!" We take the words literally then, and distinguish between shadow and substance, the latter independent of the light, the former coming with the light, moving as the light moves, and vanishing as the light goes out. The substance then endures while the shadows pass away with the light. Now, get the metaphor clear. Does the poet mean that the glories of our blood and state are actually shadows? No! that they are like shadows. In what way do they resemble shadows? They pass away. Yes, but where do they go? Either to other people or, at least, away from the person who had them. Life then is the light, and when life goes the

" Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,  
The lone and level sands stretch far away."

What has become of his garlands? The sonnet helps to bring home to the children the truth of the poem. Passing on, we note the effect of *purple* in the third line, and of all that is contained in *victor-victim*. We note also the synecdoche in " *your heads* must come ", pointing out its appropriateness. It carries on the figure of " the garlands wither on your brow ". The glories are represented by garlands, but the garlands wither and the heads must come to the " cold tomb ". And now we come suddenly upon the last couplet. Strange as it may seem, I have generally found that the pupils, though they are quite aware of the couplet, have failed to appreciate its effect. I say we come now suddenly upon the last couplet, for it comes like a discovery. Here is something that does not pass away. Here, then, are the substantial things we have been looking for. But what about the just? Has not Death levelled them also? Evidently. The couplet shows it. What is the meaning of the lines, if not that, when the just have been brought, as all are, to the dust, their actions still live on and " blossom in their dust "? What are we to include in the " actions of the just "? Ask the pupils if they have enjoyed the poem; if they have, point out that Shirley died in 1666. In that year Death the Leveller brought him to the dust. But did this poem die then too? No! It still lives and gives us

pleasure. It then is not a shadow but a substantial thing. It still

" Smells sweet and blossoms in his dust ".

Here I would read, as a contrast to the sonnet above, and as a confirmation of this last point, Cory's poem beginning:

" They told me, Heraclitus, they told me you were dead ",

drawing particular attention to the last two lines;

" Still are thy pleasant voices, thy nightingales, awake;  
For Death, he taketh all away, but them he cannot take."

Now we are on the track of the things that do not pass away, scientific discoveries, works of art of all kinds, great deeds of courage and self-sacrifice, and here we ask for the line that appears on our War Memorials, " Their name liveth for evermore ". But in what do all these things that live resemble each other? This is a difficult question, but we can lead them to the answer that they are all triumphs of the spirit. The poem says, " The glories of our blood and state "; well, these are the glories of the spirit. And so the poem means to us that the glories of the flesh are temporal and pass away, but the glories of the spirit are eternal and endure.

" The glories of our blood and state  
Are shadows, not substantial things;

• • • •  
Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust."

## CHAPTER VII

### HOW TO HELP THE PUPILS TO READ POETRY

I have already suggested, at the close of the last chapter, one good reason why the children should be encouraged to read poetry aloud. When we hear a good song, do we not have real pleasure in humming it over to ourselves, and, when we are alone, singing it aloud? It is better than merely thinking it over, and that for at least two reasons. When we sing it we actually hear it, and as Providence has been good enough to hide from us how poor our voices are, we experience a much finer realization of the song than anyone else who happens to hear us. But, in addition to that, the emotions and thoughts roused in us by the song are calling for expression. By singing the song we give them expression. We live the song and it goes as we would have it go, and it is a real satisfaction, a real joy to us. This is what we would have our pupils do in poetry. Here it must be admitted that the need to read aloud is not nearly so imperious as the need to sing aloud. Most of us, if we have heard a poem well read, can attain by a silent reading a much fuller realization of the poem than we can of the song by a

silent perusal of the score. And this, which is undoubtedly a gain to poetry, is also a loss; for it leads many people to forget the beauty of sound in the poetry, to forget that it is music, so that they lose more than we can well estimate. Some people, on hearing a poem well read, which they have often read silently and thought they knew, seem to awaken to a realization of all they have been missing, while, as I have said, many will not read poetry at all, though they delight in hearing it read.

If, then, our pupils are to read aloud we must give them all the help we can towards reading well. As example in this is better—much better—than precept, the teacher must do all in his power to make his reading a joy to the pupils. I have spoken of this already, but there is more to be said. I have listened to students reading to a class and said to them at the close: “Yes, you mean well, and will, I believe, do well: there was real expression, real feeling behind your reading, and the children got it; but what is wrong with you is that you cannot use your voice; I can read the poem better than you can, because I have more command of my voice, more experience in using it: I trust my voice, and so the feeling does not remain behind: you do not trust your voice: if you knew that you could express fairly well by your voice what you feel about the poem, that while you were enjoying the luxury of the sound, it would thrill along your voice and reach your pupils, you would have less hesitation about letting yourself go, you would

live the poem more intensely: you would get more home to the pupils."

The student who is in earnest about poetry will know that, if the poet is to speak to the pupils, it must be through his voice, and so he will try to prepare his voice for the poet's use. He will not wish that his pupils should hear Walter de la Mare speak with a pronounced Glasgow accent, or that Keats and Shelley should slur their words together, or that Shakespeare should be guilty of bad, slovenly, careless articulation. If the student is in earnest about poetry, I say, for, if he is, he will give to his training in phonetics the serious attention which every reader of poetry knows it deserves I do not pretend to be an authority on voice production, so I shall keep to what I know.

✓ The beginning of good reading lies in good speaking. If you will aim at good clear articulation in your speech, you will help yourself more than you know, and to imagine that you can become a good reader while you remain a careless, slovenly speaker is absurd. It has been pointed out by some critic that if the writer aims always at speaking as well as he can, and at expressing himself in ordinary conversation as well as he can, the practice of selecting the finer sounds, phrases, and expressions becomes almost sub-conscious, and he reaps his harvest when he sits down to write. For then, when his mind is full of his subject he is saved endless time and trouble, as the finer words and phrases come naturally to him. No singer who cares anything about singing neglects to train his voice, but

you who wish to read poetry do not make use of the opportunities you have. If you will do your best to improve your speech and will practise reading simple phrases and passages well, till it becomes a habit to give the vowel its full value and to articulate the consonants, when you come to read poetry in earnest you will find your voice an instrument on which you can play, one through which your feelings and thoughts become beautiful in sound. There is no Training College without its lecturer on Phonetics ready to give you just the training you need. I know, of course, you want to play Beethoven, but it happens to be the case that what you need is practice at scales and five-finger exercises. If your enthusiasm is worth anything you will see in these the possibility of the music of the future, and you will give to them the serious attention they deserve. Only when they have become a habit, have become your natural way of speaking, are you ready to read; for when reading poetry aloud we have time for nothing but the poem. If at that time we have to watch our pronunciation, we may read the words well, but certainly not the poem. Look at it from the point of view of the pupils. Your voice is the voice they are to hear day after day: your pronunciation is to be their authority not only during the poetry lesson, but during all lessons. You young teachers are, or should be, the missionaries of pure English to the children of the nation. Is the responsibility light? You will have, many of you, to fight an uphill battle all your lives, struggling against the influence of home

and environment, you the one monument of English spoken and read as it should be. It is not easy to over-emphasize the importance of the correctness of your pronunciation and speech.

If the teacher is taking a poem from his own anthology he will naturally be word perfect and rhythm perfect. Before we attempt to read a poem we must be absolutely word perfect. It is surely the least that can be asked by way of preparation, that we should know the words, their pronunciation and significance in the poem, that they may flow from us easily and smoothly, as if they were the natural expression of our own thoughts. Similarly we must know absolutely the rhythm of the poem, where the accent or beat falls—in short, how it goes. The rhythm is so much part of the expression of the thought that we cannot understand the poem without knowing it. How can we have felt the poem through, if our pulse has never quickened to the beat of the music? How can we really read the poem without giving full value to the rhythm? Yet when you listen to some teachers reading or teaching reading, you become convinced that the only thing you must watch is the punctuation. The punctuation, we are told, shows the meaning. What meaning, may we ask? Is it the poet's meaning? If so, why do you think he adopted the metre he did, if it was not essential to his meaning, part of his meaning? And if it was essential, do you imagine you can reproduce his meaning, without at the same time reproducing his metre? When we read, there must be no stumbling

through lines, the beat lost, and the music gone. We must so feel the metre that it will flow from us as if it were the natural beat of the music of our own thoughts. These things I might call the externals, the correctness of our speech and articulation and our knowledge of the words and the rhythm of the poem. These must be perfect, as perfect as we can make them; for if we are to live the poem, if our minds are to flow forth freely to the children, there must be no difficulties in the channels of expression.

If this is necessary for the teacher, it is just as necessary for the pupils. We must do our best to improve their speech. This, however, is not an affair of one lesson, or of one year, but of their whole school life. In addition, if we have taught the poem they should be both word perfect and rhythm perfect. What then are we to aim at in their reading? Two things, at least, let us avoid—firstly that artificial style of lifting the voice at each comma and dropping it at each period, by which the reading of a whole class becomes sterilized, void of all expression: it is neither natural nor beautiful, and reduces reading to an interpretation of punctuation: secondly, let us avoid what is sometimes, by a misuse of the word, called recitation—a method of putting in expression whether we feel it or not. We have all heard those so-called recitations, in which the speaking of a poem becomes a sort of performance, not a natural expression of what we feel. I should greatly regret if anyone should think I am attacking real recitation, or real verse-speaking.

Verse-speaking, in fact, is just what I think we should aim at. Tell the children to speak the verses; make it clear that they are to do so naturally, just as they would speak. But as they vary their own speech to suit the subject of conversation, now speaking rapidly in the excitement of telling a tale, now slowly and seriously when they have something of importance to communicate, now angrily or light-heartedly as the mood may be, so they must let their minds be full of the poem, and speak it out as if the feelings and thoughts and words were their own. Let the test of the reading be, "Is that how the poet would say it?" "Does the reading interpret the poem?" We shall have to deal later with the question, "Is poetry true to life?" Impress upon the children here that what they have to do is to speak for the poet, that they must be true to him. Get the class to criticize the reading. They are good critics, and with a little encouragement will speak out. They will tell you that the reading of A was clearer and brought out the rhythm better, but that of B had more feeling in it and expressed the meaning better. The moment children begin to criticize the reading of their comrades they are beginning to set up a standard for themselves, which they will aim at realizing when they read. More than that, they are becoming more and more conscious that the poem is clear, articulate, beautiful, expressive sound. It is good to devote a whole period occasionally to the reading of poems by the children, each being allowed to choose the poem he will read, and each being

criticized by the class. But over and above all let the teacher never forget to give his word of kindly encouragement to all who try. Let it be the teacher's motto that every child who tries, has, to some extent, succeeded. We want them to try. Attainment must be a matter of degree, but all can try, and all who try can be encouraged. In the same way the teacher should devote a period occasionally to reading what the children wish him to read. Let them choose the poems. He will soon find their favourites. What can be better than that children should wish to hear certain poems again? They are, unconsciously, building up their anthology. It is not waste of time to read to the children poems that they know. It is but making sure that those things of beauty will be a joy for ever to them. They may have little or no opportunity of hearing poetry well read when they leave school. Let, at least those poems they love get a chance of sinking into their memory.

And now, at the risk of seeming to repeat myself, I wish to say a word more on the comparative importance of reading poetry to the children and of teaching it. I fear lest the space I have devoted to the teaching of my three lessons should suggest that I think the teaching of the poem the more important, so I shall put my opinions dogmatically: the teacher ought to spend more time reading poetry than teaching it, and for every poem he teaches he ought to read about a dozen. We ought to teach a few in order that the children may see how much may be got out

of a single poem, but while the time for poetry is as limited as it is, we have only time for a few. But at all costs we must find time for reading poetry to the children. If we are really reading, the poets will say more, infinitely more, than we can say. We must remember that the children are limited to our anthology. When we teach a poem it is probable that to some members of the class this poem does not make the appeal we hope. We want to get home to them all and to insure this we must read as wide a variety of poems as possible. The important thing is that every child should hear some poems that really go home to his heart and awaken his imagination, and that poetry should appeal to the child in as many different ways as possible. Though we do not teach a poem, that does not mean that we must say nothing about it. A word or two with the children on some points in the poem will not take much time, and will help to drive them home. But let the poets speak. Lead the children into fresh fields. Take a period with Walter de la Mare, a period with Newbolt, a period with ballads, a period with a modern anthology, a period with poems they know, a period with poems from the great poets. Read each poem twice; give the children time to form their own impressions; invite them to criticize and help them in doing so. Let the poetry period be, as far as possible, a period of joy, a period of finding new and beautiful things, or of pondering over things they love already. Let them choose for themselves the poems they are to learn by heart, each

choosing his own favourites. Thus only can we develop a taste for poetry, and train their ear to the variety of beautiful sounds. Thus only can we rouse in them some idea of the wealth of poetry that lies before them. Remember that we must aim at turning out readers of poetry, not students of poetry. A few may become students of poetry, and if we detect them we can give them additional help. But the majority of our pupils will never study poetry. They might, however, be led to read it for themselves. If they can but hear sufficient poetry, so that they become familiar with its form and sound, and if they are led to associate the idea of poetry with joy, and beauty and freedom to choose, with the mystery of faery, the wonderful things of life, and the beauty of nature, if to them it is always a thing of beauty, it may remain a joy for ever. I can imagine the scorn of some teachers on reading this last sentence, but I would like to ask them: "If the poem is not a thing of beauty to you, why are you teaching it to the children? How do you propose to attain the ends for which poetry is included in the curriculum by teaching poems that you do not think beautiful? And if you think them beautiful, but cannot make them appear so to your pupils, what are we to say about your teaching? Perhaps the less the better."

This raises the endless question as to the proportion of time we ought to give to intensive and extensive reading respectively. It has been urged, not by one writer, but by many, that in school we should have

but one aim, to educate the young that they may take their place in life as men and women. They will soon enough be narrowed down to their particular trade or profession. While they are young, we ought to give them as broad an education as possible. We ought to fight, at all times, against the idea that our work is to train young clerks, or engineers, or farmers. Our aim is not to train a boy for a trade or a profession, but to prepare him for life, which is so much broader; and this demands that we should send him out with an open and alert mind, and as broad an education as possible.

But, while we claim this, do we not tend in the Secondary School to train all as if the aim of their existence were to get to the University—as if, instead of preparing our pupils to take their place as men and women in society, our one duty were to prepare young students for the University? Is Higher Grade education a preparation for life, or for one department of life only—that of the student? If it is a preparation for life, why is it that so small a percentage of the pupils who pass through the Elementary schools seem fitted to benefit by it? It cannot be the pupils who are at fault. As I understand it, the schools exist for the pupils, and if their aim is to prepare the pupils to take their place in life, well they all need preparation. It cannot be the Elementary teachers who are at fault, for they, at least, are doing their best, under the most adverse conditions, to prepare the children for what lies before them. If our Higher Grade education aims

really at carrying on this work, why, then, let the teachers in this department take up the burden.

Here we are met with the statement that it is only a small proportion of our pupils that are fitted by nature to benefit by Higher Grade education. Why put the libel on nature? Why not say frankly that our Higher Grade education is fitted to benefit only a small percentage of our pupils? Could there be any more damning criticism of our educational system? The department where the conditions under which education is carried on are the best, where the classes are the smallest, to which the most highly qualified teachers are sent, is not fitted to help the children of the nation. When they have reached the age of twelve this great department has no word for them, unless they are going to become students. I look forward to the day when Higher Grade education will be really a higher grade of education for all, and when we will not limit these teachers to preparing their pupils for one department of life only—that of the student. I want the higher grade education, with all it could give, for those who are never to become students, *because* they will never become students. I want them to get the best the Higher Grade teachers can give them; not the preparation for Leaving Certificates and Bursary Preliminary Examinations, which, seen in their true light, are but small things, but the broadening influence of further culture in Science and Mathematics, in Languages and Art, and this untrammelled by examinations and conditions; and if you tell me that

the children of the nation in general are not fitted to benefit by this, I say it is a blasphemy on human nature. I know they are not fitted for the conditions of Higher Grade education; but give me the rejected of this department and I shall take with them a play of Shakespeare, and you will see them bright and happy and intelligent. I have done it, not once, but many times. These pupils were not fitted to benefit by Higher Grade education, but they were fitted to enjoy Shakespeare.

But, let us return to things as they are, and see what is the effect of making our Higher Grade Schools forcing-beds for the University. I think I am safe in saying that not one-fifth of the pupils who enter our Higher Grade and Secondary Schools ever reach the University. The effect of this specialized training upon English is bad for the many, whatever it may be for the few. As an example, why can we not train our pupils to be readers of Shakespeare, instead of little premature students of Shakespeare? To study Shakespeare, we must first enjoy him. The first question that should be asked a class is whether they have really enjoyed the play they have read. If not, what does the teacher think he has been doing? Has he been worrying his pupils over theories and meanings, while the broad stream of Shakespeare's life flows past unnoticed? I know we must have the meanings and the theories, but we must first have the play. Put it to any critic of standing as a question of method: "Ought we not to read a play three or four times at

least and attempt to see it for ourselves, before we look at any criticism?"

Dr. Johnson in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare says:—

"Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils. Let him that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play, from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing, let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged, let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of Theobald and of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness, and read the commentators."

"Particular passages are cleared by notes, but the general effect of the work is weakened. The mind is refrigerated by interruption; the thoughts are diverted from the principal subject; the reader is weary, he suspects not why; and at last throws away the book which he has too diligently studied.

"Parts are not to be examined till the whole has been surveyed; there is a kind of intellectual remoteness necessary for the comprehension of any great work in its full design and in its true proportions; a close approach shows the smaller niceties,

they are being shown it through the eyes of Coleridge, Dowden, Bradley, Raleigh—a practice which is wholly bad; a practice which these critics would wholeheartedly condemn; a practice for which even its exponents have nothing to say, except that it helps the pupils through the "Higher". We ought to read and enjoy with them as much of Shakespeare as possible. As in the short poem, a certain amount of intensive work must be done to show the pupils how to tackle a play for themselves, and get most out of it; but, above all things, we must read, and read widely, in Shakespeare, making it our aim, not that they should know about him, but that they should love his plays. In this way we will broaden their view of life, familiarize them with many of the finest things in literature, and, above all, help them to become readers of Shakespeare. The general reader rarely ventures into this field. He may have studied a little in it in school, and he regards it as too full of difficulties, as a field for the student—as if Shakespeare wrote for students and not for men and women! They have not been taught either to trust him or themselves. And yet there is no more delightful book in English for the general reader than the book of Shakespeare's plays. As for preparing the young students for the University, I wonder what the Professors of English in our Universities would say—whether they would not be entirely satisfied if they found that their students had read widely and enjoyed Shakespeare in school: whether this would not form the best background for

the work they wish to do. If the boy is going to be a student, surely there will be plenty of time for him to discuss the theories after he leaves school. He will be more mature, capable of coming to some decision, instead of merely accepting what is thrust upon him; and this would allow the others, to whom the theories mean so little, but to whom the plays might mean so much, to get the plays. For how many of our pupils who will never become students of Shakespeare might this mean the beginning of a lifelong friendship with the plays themselves?

And so it is with the short poem. The field of our reading can hardly be too wide. Most children spend at least eight years in school. Think what might be accomplished even in the limited time allowed to poetry, what a wealth of lyrics and ballads the children might have heard, how full their own little anthologies might be, if we would but realize how precious a thing it is for them to have enjoyed poetry and found there not only beauty but truth.

I have remarked above on the importance of training children to listen with their imaginations awake. There are various methods of testing how much the children can gather at one reading, and some people urge that, unless the children feel that they are going to be questioned or tested, they will not pay sufficient attention. To this I can but reply that, if they do feel that they are going to be questioned and tested, they will not listen to poetry in the right way. Put it to any student who has had to read a certain amount of

poetry for an examination, whether the thought of the questions that might be asked, and the doubt as to whether he would remember all the points, did not rob the poetry of part, if not of all, its joy. To allow this to occur in school is to defeat the very end we have in view in teaching poetry. If the child is to enjoy, he must listen with an untroubled mind. We want the critical intellect asleep for the moment, that the field may be clear for the receptive imagination. The freer the child's mind is, the more he is likely to receive, and—as he can criticize only what he has received—the better he will be able to criticize. Some teachers do not seem to understand that you cannot have the receptive imagination and the critical intellect both in the field at the one time if either is to do its best work—that the one supplies the material for the other—that we can criticize only what we have felt, and so understood, of the poem.

The things that boys give their most serious attention to, are those they do for pleasure—their games and recreations of all kinds, including such forms of recreation as reading, stamp-collecting, and so on. Practically the same may be said for men. To nothing do they give such whole-hearted devotion as to their games, except it be that, to many, the game of life becomes the most interesting of all games. All education, in this sense, should be play—something that the children enter into with pleasure. Otherwise we can never have their serious attention. It cannot be forced from them. It is something which they alone

can give, but which they do give, at once, and without thought, when the subject is put before them in the right way. People talk of the demoralizing effect of making the school a place of enjoyment. But this is a mere confusion of thought. The school is a place for work. If, however, we are to get the best work out of the child, he must be happy in his work. There is all the difference in the world between seeking for pleasure, and seeking for something and finding our pleasure in the keenness of the search. Watch a boy who is fond of Rugby, or a keen chess-player, during the game, and ask what sort of play this is? Is it not as serious as life itself? This is the kind of play we wish education to be; for here the imagination needs no awakening, and the best training it can have is but sufficient exercise in the game. This is what I have been aiming at in all I have written above. If the teacher loves the poem, so that his reading is a joy to the children, his voice will awaken their imaginations. If the land of poetry has become for them the "Land of Heart's Desire", where the boy's love of adventure and the girl's love of faery can be equally well satisfied, where they have already found much that delighted them, and into which they can adventure with the confident hope of finding more, what need we trouble about their imaginations? All the training they need is to be taken back frequently enough to the land of poetry. That is how to train them, not only to listen, but—what is just as important—to adventure for themselves into this land. I shall return

to this when I take up the question of the child's anthology; but, in closing this chapter, I should like to give one experience I had of this extensive reading. For a year and a half while I was head of the English Department in a Secondary school, I carried on a reading club of advanced pupils. We met one evening per week. During that time I read with them the whole of *The Ring and the Book*, over 21,000 lines in length, and sixteen plays of Shakespeare.

## CHAPTER VIII

### BEAUTY IS TRUTH

In an earlier chapter I have pointed out that the first qualification for the teacher of poetry is that he should love it for its beauty. I would now add that the second qualification is that he should believe in its truth. Much of our teaching suffers from the fact that the teacher has no real belief, no living faith in the truth of what he teaches. Probably he has never thought out the question, never tested it, never even doubted it, because he has never really believed it. We appreciate this at once, when we think of the difference there so often is between the teaching of one of Euclid's propositions and a poem. In the former the teacher knows definitely the truth of what he is teaching and works, therefore, with confidence and decision. On the other hand, to many, the poem seems an unreal thing beside it, a beautiful pleasant thing, but lacking in the grip of truth which is so pronounced in the other. And yet, what is the truth of poetry? "Poetry . . . sits close to life, and like a well-fitting garment displays its form and members."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> PROFESSOR MACNEILE DIXON, *Tragedy.*  
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Herein lies the difficulty. It depends upon the character of the teacher, or upon his view of life, whether he can perceive the truth of poetry or not; for the man's view of life is a revelation of the man himself. If, to him, there is no music in the world, it is because he has no ear for music. If art has no charm for him, we do not blame art. If philosophy has no appeal, we do not think philosophy lacking. If, as to Peter Bell,

“A primrose by the river's brim  
A yellow primrose was to him  
And it was nothing more”,

we do not feel that nature has failed, but recall to our minds that to Wordsworth the same primrose could give

“Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears”.

There is truth, great truth, in Coleridge's words:

“Ah! lady, we receive but what we give  
And in our life alone does nature live.”

But, if we accept all this, we should be prepared to go a little further. If, in human life, a man can see neither beauty nor greatness, nothing lovable and nothing worthy of trust, we should remember that his view of life is but the mirror of himself, that why he fails to find these in others is that they do not exist in himself. Think of the man who is called “cute”: the man who is never taken in: who never makes the mistake of trusting anyone, because, there being nothing

worthy of trust in his contemptible soul, he can see none in the world. Think also of the man who calls himself blasé, and prides himself in it, forgetting that the measure of a man is the measure of what he can drink from life's cup with unquenched thirst: put him beside Tennyson's picture of Ulysses with his thirst for life—

“ I would drink life to the lees ”,

or Kipling's

“ For to admire an' for to see,  
For to behold this world so wide—  
It never done no good to me,  
But I can't drop it if I tried! ”

and we feel how shallow he is. He has taken his little sip, and thinks he has drained the cup. It is natural that he should think life as shallow as himself. Life has not lost its zest because he is blasé ! Life does not fail. It is ever there, full of power and passion, and beauty and sorrow, and sin, the cancer of the soul, and love, infinite in its reach, and simple human trust, that makes a face so beautiful, and courage that glorifies a man: and, brooding over all, the mystery that allures the soul, but never satisfies it. It is to this life that poetry is true, and the great poets are among that small band of men who, gifted with eyes that see, have looked with souls athirst for truth into the face of life and found there all that could satisfy the spirit except that for which the spirit yearns most—the

solution of life's mystery. Think of the great dramatists of Greece. After more than two thousand years, their picture of life still stands as one of the great and unsurpassable wonders of art. For example, let the student read Murray's translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, and he will find there a picture in which love and beauty and pain are so blended, that he will rejoice almost in tears over the wonder of human life. Or let him wander through Dante's *Inferno*—a journey which no man of open mind can take and come back unchanged. Yet these he will read only in translations, and the translators are the first to tell us that, in losing the original language, "that large utterance of the early gods", our loss is almost incalculable. Turn to our own literature. It is universally admitted that in the rôle of England's great men there are none greater than her poets, and that of these the greatest is Shakespeare; and what his critics have praised in him perhaps more than anything else, is his complete sanity. His dramas are true to life—truer than anything else that has been written in English. We have in him the greatest mind of our race, looking with clear eyes, undimmed by any theories, straight at life. Do you wish to know about human life, its "power and potency", its laughter and despair? You will get more from him than from anyone. Or turn to Milton, and learn in *Paradise Lost* the meaning of the sublime. Goethe, in his *Wilhelm Meister*, put as, perhaps, the greatest thing in education, the inculcation of the spirit of

of agnosticism, that Matthew Arnold brings peace to their souls: that the strength and dignity and beauty and infinite reach of the spirit that he yet finds in nature and human nature come like new life and hope to them; and they welcome his cry:

“Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try  
If we then, too, can be such men as he!*”

and rejoice that at times to them also, as to him, in spite of the river of doubt on which they float,

“—The night-wind  
Brings up the stream  
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.”

We pass again to Browning, and breathe his strong optimism, his confidence that life means strife to attain an ideal—an ideal which is unattainable, a strife then that is doomed to failure—but that this is the success and triumph of life; for this shows that life on earth is, in itself, a thing incomplete: that to attempt to judge it as if it were complete is like judging the man while yet an apprentice, while yet a learner, and before he has had the opportunity, by putting out his power on life, of showing the potency that is in him.

“Leave now for dogs and apes,  
Man has Forever.”

Are we to treat the work of such spirits as something pleasant and beautiful, but lacking in reality and truth? Are we to treat them as if they ministered

to our idler, less serious moods? Are we to take poetry as many people take their religion, as a matter of Church observance, a social affair which occupies Sunday and leaves them free to go their own way for the rest of the week—as if religion, real religion, could be separated from life? We are so cold-blooded now that we have lost all sympathy with passion. The deeds that society condemns are those which men commit when blinded by the mist of passion. And it is well that they should be condemned, for we ought to be able to control ourselves. But we should remember that passion is the very flame of life, that it burns both to purify and to destroy, that it is the same passion, differently directed, which lifts man at one time to the gates of Heaven and, at another, conducts him to the gates of Hell. But, while we condemn the sins of passion, we condone the cold-blooded hypocrisy of those who make of religion a social decency, or, worse than that, affect religion because it is good business, it pays—those

“ Who, never naming God except for gain,  
So never took that useful name in vain ”,

or, worst of all, these self-righteous shining lights who live for the letter and do their best to kill the spirit of religion. Just so with poetry. The teacher too often lives in a world of prose. He thinks himself a man of experience, one who knows too much to take poetry seriously. His early enthusiasms and ideals have all faded. You will hear him jibe at the enthusiasm of

young ones and remark, with a shrug of the shoulders: "We have had these ideals too." He is merely making public his own failure, for ideals that will not stand the test of life, that cannot be carved into act,

"Are shadows, not substantial things".

The test of love is to find itself in the monotonous and harassing details of life. It is perhaps the most difficult thing the young teacher has to learn, that the task for him is to see the ideal in the details of his work, in the correction of exercises just as much as in the reading of poetry. I tell my students that it is easy to begin with enthusiasm, but the race of life is long. They all get off the mark with plenty of go, and there is a fine rush to begin with. Some soon begin to sag and drop out. Others hold on for a bit. A few endure to the end. And those who are readiest to laugh at the enthusiasm of the beginners are just those who sagged and dropped out in the first round of their own race. They who have lived a life of prose, who see neither beauty nor wonder in the sunset, and to whom the coming of spring is a commonplace, who are they to teach poetry? In teaching, a man's ideal is tried and tested in every way. But, if he is a man, he will win through to the end, his ideal changed no doubt, or it would have died, for life means change; but changed because it has lived and developed, has found its nurture in life, its realization there. I have heard teachers, many a time, condemn the clergy for not living up to their profession. Let criticism, like charity, begin at

home. What profession makes higher claims for itself than ours? These claims are our ideal, our profession of faith. Do our utmost, we shall not attain. More than that, when we are doing our utmost we alone shall know how far we are from attaining. For a profession such as ours asks the whole of a man, and our motto should be, "If, with all your hearts, ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me." "But," I shall be asked, "is not this making a kind of religion of teaching?" Well, what else is it? What else is any real work? If education is taken in its right sense, can anything be more sacred to us than the education of our children? But if we are so desperately in earnest as this, will it not tend to make the teaching too serious and cast a sort of gloom over the school? Why should it? A religion that is worthy of the name must live in all that is good in life. If it cannot find itself in the humour as in the pathos of life, in the joy as in the sorrow, in the little things as in the great, it but shows its own weakness, its own limited nature. A religion that would tend to crush the happy joyous laughter of children would stand self-condemned. We teachers agree readily enough about this, but what about our own teaching, if it does likewise? It is not the spirit I am advocating that will do this, for it is a spirit, not of self-sacrifice, but of self-realization, of finding ourselves in our work by seeking there our ideal. If you are seeking to find in your work the joy and meaning of life, if with all your hearts ye truly seek it, your pupils shall ever surely find it there. How can

it be otherwise? They will find in your work what you seek there. It is that careless empty attitude towards work which I have condemned, that spirit which finds its only joys in play or recreation outside its work; this it is which casts a gloom on the school and makes even of poetry a dull empty dead thing. In the teaching of poetry I would hope for that spirit which we find sometimes in truly religious people. They do not talk much about religion or the church, but there seems to breathe from them a spirit of serene faith that finds its work and its religion in all around. It is the confidence in the truth of poetry, that does not show itself in assertion and discussion, but in an attitude to poetry and life, a quiet confidence that the beauty of poetry is not a fanciful imaginary picture too fine to be true to life, but that this beauty is the truth of life, and that it is for us to find it in life, this is the ideal spirit for the teachers of poetry. I know that you will find some who teach thus, who have never gone into the question of the truth of poetry, who seem unaware even of its existence;

“ Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot  
Who do thy work, and know it not.”

But do not let us assume that we are among them. We must guard this faith from the scepticism of the shallow, by keeping in touch with the great minds in poetry, by not merely reading but living the great plays and poems we love. When doubt is cast on our faith we need not argue in support of it. Our faith is not founded on

argument, but on experience. To renew our faith we have but to go once more to the well of poetry and drink. If you are a lover of Shakespeare, go to him when your faith is attacked. In his presence doubt cannot live. Is it Shelley or Keats you love? At the sound of their music your doubt will fade away. The value of this faith to the teacher in his work it is not easy to estimate. I have said earlier that in teaching poetry the teacher must remember that life will breed life and death, death. It is just a question of life or death. If your attitude to poetry is right it will breed the same attitude in your pupils. Poetry will become for them one of the real things of life. The importance of this in the education of the children, and in their after life, is to be measured by the importance of poetry in the life of our nation.

I have stated in an earlier chapter that in poetry, as in all art, we reach truth through beauty, and that if we do not appreciate the beauty of a poem we cannot get its truth. It is right then that the child should approach the truth of poetry in the natural way. During his earlier years he should be like a child gathering flowers with no thought but for their beauty. No question of the truth of poetry should be introduced until the child is of an age to feel that this somehow adds to its beauty, brings poetry out of a sort of happy fairyland and shows it, with all its beauty, to be an inhabitant of our own world. While the child's greatest happiness in poetry lies in dreaming, let him dream. In one way there are no truer inhabitants of the land

of poetry than those little dreamers, and many of them when they awaken to life will never find poetry so real again. It is in these early years that the teacher's attitude to poetry is of most importance. Knowing the child's land of dreams, it is easy, without ever seeming to bring the cold light of reality into this world, to show how often the dreams are like real life. In fact, if the teacher's attitude is consistently right the experience of the child will be that of a dream come true, as his land of dreams gradually takes substance and reality in the growing appreciation that the beauty is true to life.

“ —All this, how far away!  
Mere delectation, meet for a minute's dream!”<sup>1</sup>

And yet, why should it be so? It is generally admitted that the beginners in a subject need most individual attention, that as they advance and get to know more they can do more for themselves. In addition, it is generally admitted that the first steps must be taken with great care. Otherwise they may go entirely wrong, and may not only have to begin again, but have to try to forget what has been learned, that they may begin anew. If this be so, apply it to our schools. The pupils in the Elementary department, not only because they are the beginners but also because they are so young that they cannot be expected to do much for themselves, evidently need most

<sup>1</sup> BROWNING, *The Ring and the Book*—Giuseppe Caponsacchi, ll. 2096-7.

individual uttered a form their teacher. So surely, as the children in this department have to take their first steps in most of the subjects which they will study right through their school career, so too there is the teaching more important. In addition, this is the only department through which pass all the children of the nation. There seems to be every reason why special attention ought to be given to this department. And what do we find? The young children who can do best for themselves, who depend most upon their teachers, are headed off to class so large that individual attention is almost impossible, and frequently taught under conditions that make education almost impossible. It is in such surroundings, where often indeed the truth does not seem beautiful, that the teachers in the elementary and advanced divisions have to attempt to impress on their pupils that beauty is truth. To many the circumstances are discouraging—the ugly room, the noisy street, the ragged children—that the early enthusiasm fades away and work becomes a drudgery. Yet where will the teacher's love for poetry get a better chance, or where is it more needed? It is in circumstances like these that the teacher's confidence in the truth of poetry is of so great importance. Is there to be poetry in the life of these little ones? Look for it and you will find it there. Take, for example, Laurence Binyon's poem, *The Little Dancers*.<sup>1</sup> He has not idealized the street, the tavern, the ugly surroundings. But look

<sup>1</sup> See *Poems of Today*, First Series.

at the two little girls, dancing to the music of the barrel-organ,

“Their eyes shining, grave with a perfect pleasure”.

Is that not poetry, the poetry of life? Is beauty not truth to them, at least while they dance? To such pupils more than to any the teacher of poetry has a mission. Putting aside all educational theories, in the plain light of our duty as teachers to the children, where the need is most, there we should give most: where there is least external beauty, there we need most the beauty of the spirit. But as the most highly qualified teachers of English are all for the Higher Grade Department the Elementary and Advanced Division teachers must take the post as they always have done. But let it be noted that, whatever society may say, this is the post of honour: here the need is most; here there is most work to be done: here the reward—not the pay, but the real reward—is the greatest. We teachers of poetry are apt to be repelled at times by the character of these pupils. They seem coarse, vulgar, lacking in all fineness of appreciation. What chance have they had? Think of the circumstances and the environment in which many of them live. What fineness of appreciation would you expect to live and develop under such conditions? And you—why have you been sent here, but to try to bring a little of that fineness and good taste and beauty into the lives of the children; and to get your narrow soul broadened a bit? What is the use of your faith in the

is and how often in after years, and more than they ever could deserve, they receive from them tributes of gratitude and affection that "overpay all labours and anxieties". Let me put it once again for my own subject. Let the teacher face, definitely, the question: "What is the value of poetry in the life of our nation?" and remember that that is also the value of his work. What these children will be as men and women depends, to a certain extent, upon how he regards his work, and the manner in which he devotes himself to it. Upon this also depends what his own life will be —what he will find in it. If he does not seek, he will not find.

As a conclusion to this chapter I shall sketch briefly a lesson I have taught occasionally to advanced pupils, though it could be modified easily to suit pupils of from fourteen to fifteen years of age. The aim of the lesson is to bring before pupils, deliberately, the question of the truth of poetry. Two or three questions generally suffice to draw from the pupils the fact that while they like poetry, and think it beautiful, they do not think of it as true. They will tell you that it is "imaginary" or that it belongs to the world of imagination. I then propose to them that we have a discussion; that I shall try to prove that poetry is as true to ordinary human life as mathematics, if they will take the other side; and the boys, at least, generally accept the challenge with eagerness. We begin with arithmetic. The proof then goes thus—1 and 1 make 2. I am one and this boy here is one. Add us and you get 2. But 2

is the double of 1. If you add us are we the double of one—by the way, of which one? Are we double the weight, double the value, can we do double the work in the same time, or in what sense are we the double of one? As this question is, generally, too difficult to answer we take another example, two desks. But here it is easy to show that they are not exactly the same weight—in fact, not exactly the same in any way. Once again we fail to add them. I now produce two pennies. What about these? Again they admit that in size, weight, composition, they are not exactly the same. But, when I ask “Is there nothing in which these two pennies are exactly the same? I get the answer “In value”. It is easy to show that this does not mean they consist of the same amount of alloy; more than that, the alloy itself is not of the value of a penny. Where then is the value? We give it to the penny, but it really exists in our imagination. It is a sort of imaginary quality we attach to the coin and we show this at once by producing a bank-note. “Yes,” I say, “but was not this just the fault you were finding with poetry?” Turn to Euclid. Here it does not take long to show that points which have position but not magnitude, lines which have length but not breadth, are also imaginary “Yes,” I ask, “but are they any the worse for belonging to the world of imagination?” A boy takes his knife and a piece of wood and, after working at it for some time, shapes a little boat. What governed all the boy’s actions, as he worked with the wood? Was it not the picture he had in his imagination

And as Echo far off through the vale my sad orison  
rolls,  
I think, O my lovel 'tis thy voice, from the Kingdom of  
Souls  
Faintly answering still the notes that once were so dear."

Is the poem true to life? Before we can answer the question we must decide how the poet means us to take the poem. There seem to be three possible ways of taking it; it may represent a dream, meaning that at the midnight hour I fly in my dreams to the lone vale, or it may represent a waking dream, meaning that at the mid hour of night I fly in my imagination, in spirit, to the lone vale; or it may represent an actual experience, meaning that at the mid hour of night I actually go to the lone vale. (I may say that each of these has been suggested at different times, when we were discussing the poem.) I read the poem again that they may have time to turn the question over. We decide that the first is not satisfactory; that he is not merely telling us that he goes there in dreams, but that she does not appear; and that the best things in the poem would lose their force if we thought of it as a dream. The second seems not much better; if he goes only in imagination to the lone vale, how could she come to him there, when he is not there? (see lines 3-5 of the first verse). Lines 4-5 of the second verse also seem to lose their force if he does not actually hear the echo. We decide then for the third view, and now turn to the main question of its truth to life. What is this lover's custom after the death of his mistress?

He sets out at midnight for the lone vale. Is the moon shining? We do not know, but it certainly cannot be bright, as the stars seem to be bright. How do you know? He says "When the stars are weeping." Why are they weeping? Is "weeping stars" good? We decide that this is a bad example of the so-called pathetic fallacy. Picture him hastening to the lone vale in the darkness. When he arrives, what does he do? There in the lone vale, at midnight, under the weeping stars, he sings the wild song. We decide that this will not do, that Tom Moore may have behaved thus, but that it does not ring true to life. Put two lines of real poetry beside it, such as —

"The thirst that from the soul doth rise  
Doth ask a drink divine",

and it seems to shrivel up, or take the second verse of *Mary Morison*:—

"Yestreen when to the trembling string  
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha',  
To thee my fancy took its wing,—  
I sat, but neither heard nor saw:  
Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,  
And yon the toast of a' the town,  
I sigh'd, and said among them a',  
'Ye are na Mary Morison'",

and we feel how true the one is beside the other. Now, both these poems are in the *Golden Treasury*, and both are in the Oxford Book. Moore's poem then was approved both by Palgrave and Quiller-Couch. But

Moore's poem does not seem good to us. It seems merely a piece of pretty sentimental verse, and so we will not put it in our anthology. We may be wrong, but, at least, this is the truth for us. We will try another. I read Tennyson's poem *The Captain—a Legend of the Navy* beginning:—

“He that only rules by terror”.

After analysing it we decide that it will not do either—that it does not ring true: though we would not willingly lose the last picture in this poem, as it, at least, is both beautiful and true:—

“There the sunlit ocean tosses  
O'er them mouldering,  
And the lonely sea-bird crosses  
With one waft of the wing.

We try again, taking *O my Luve's like a red, red rose*, and stop to discuss the lines,

“And I will luve thee still, my dear,  
Till a' the seas gang dry:  
  
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,  
And the rocks melt wi' the sun.”

Is this true to life? What does it mean? Let us suppose that his lady says to him, “How long will you love me?” what is the lover to say? To him his love feels infinite, and how can he express the infinite but by the impossible? So he replies by the four lines above,

lost not only the beat, but the effect of the alliteration in *ploughman plods, weary way*. The very line seems heavy and weary. On the other hand, in the mock-heroic, the humorous effect often lies entirely in the contrast between the sound and the sense:

“ Dashed the bold fork through pies of pork,  
“ O'er hard boiled eggs the saltspoon shook.”

By far the most important part of this lesson is given above in one sentence, that beginning, “ I conclude this lesson by reading poem after poem from my own anthology.” The rest of the lesson is a mere introduction to this. It may seem long, but it does not take long with the class. As we are putting the poets on their defence, an introduction is necessary that the whole class may grasp the point at issue. The real lesson begins when we let the poets speak for themselves.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter I wish to draw the student's attention to four things, all of which have their importance in the teaching of poetry, but which have not yet found a place: prosody, biography, criticism, and the child's anthology.

In the Elementary and Intermediate Departments, I think prosody, except in its simplest form, should be left alone. I do not see how such terms as anapaest and amphibrach, acatalectic and hypercatalectic, can have any real significance for them, or can add, in any way, to their pleasure in poetry. But the beat of the line they must know, and their attention can be drawn to this from the earliest days. When they can repeat "Mary had a little lamb," they can tell, at once, how many beats there are in the line. It is strange how often we find pupils who cannot mark the accented syllables, but who read the line correctly. Write a number of lines of different metres on the board. Ask the pupils to copy them out and put an acute accent over each accented syllable. An examination of the papers generally gives some strange results. Ask a pupil to

read aloud from the board one of the lines he has marked wrongly and often you find that he reads it correctly. Read to him then the line as he has marked it, and he laughs at his own attempt. A little regular practice at this is important, as it helps him to find the beat when he reads a new poem for the first time, and thus makes it easier for him to get the music of the line. Similarly, the child should be taught to write out the scheme of rhyme. Children in the Elementary Department will do this readily. We do not want to distract their attention in any way while we are reading, or teaching the poem, but time should be taken occasionally to examine a number of poems they know to discuss the different metres and rhymes. They should then be directed to a number of new poems, and asked to mark the accents and write out the rhyme-schemes. I think the children ought to practise these, and attend to them carefully, that the day may sooner come when they will feel them without needing to attend to them—when they will have become part of that indefinable charm which, for want of a better word, I call the meaning of the poem. It is wonderful how keen and quick their ear becomes with a little practice. A student had just finished a lesson to a class of girls on Walter de la Mare's *The children magic hath stolen away*. I asked the class to listen to my reading of the poem, and tell me how they liked it. I read the first verse clearly and distinctly, with attention to the metre, but, as far as possible, taking all the magic out of the verse, and putting in its place

a spirit of bright cheerfulness. The girls laughed at me. What struck me was that they all laughed, and laughed so merrily. They were all genuinely amused, and when they could not get suitable words to express their condemnation of my reading, they told me it had not the right kind of music.

The process I have been referring to helps the children to hear the music when poetry is being read to them, but its real importance is felt only when the children begin to read poetry for themselves. Then it is all-important that they should get the music of the poem at once, or they may be disengaged. This makes poetry much more easy to read, and much more attractive on a first reading. Let the teacher remember that his aim is to turn out readers of poetry, and he will understand the importance of anything which will help his pupils when they have left school, and when the only poetry they will get will be what they read for themselves.

Biography I should exclude altogether, except in so far as it helps the children to understand the poetry. The poet himself published his poems, gave them to the world, as the part of himself worth knowing. Where certain facts of his life help us to a better understanding of his poems, these I would give to the children. I think, for instance, that a certain amount of biography would be helpful in reading Burns, Scott, and Wordsworth. Remember, however, that it is poetry we have to teach. If we can take the biography at some other time the children may get many an

interesting story from the lives of the poets. But some teachers seem to think that the most important thing is that the pupils should know about the poet. The important thing is that the children should have a definite feeling for his poetry. If you really love the poet you can be trusted to select. About one thing at least we may be dogmatic. We must never bring before the children these facts in the life of the poet which he himself would gladly have hidden. To do so seems to me an absolute indelicacy—an intrusion upon the poet's private life. I have no sympathy with those who state that the biographer should tell everything. To begin with, he cannot, however careful his researches. But he may succeed in digging up certain facts that show how weak the poet could be. What of them? If we are to judge, we are told, we must know the whole facts, and so we cheerfully burrow in the garbage to find the truth of the poet there. It is so easy for us to sink with him, if it means sinking, but so difficult to rise with him to his heights. The tendency is another revelation of the self. We look for ourselves in the poet's life, and find ourselves either in the weakness of the man, or in the greatness of the poet. When you hear a man say that the children ought to be shown that, after all, the poet was a man like ourselves, do you not instinctively feel that, at any rate, the poet was never a man like him? If we are to judge! Who are we to judge such men as the poets? How can we stand before the beauty of their work, the truth they reveal that gives life a new meaning,

and feel anything but reverence? And these works were not the greatest things in them. "When composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet."<sup>1</sup>

"Thoughts hardly to be packed  
Into a narrow act,  
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;  
All I could never be,  
All, men ignored in me,  
This, I was worth to God."<sup>2</sup>

Let the child at least see the poet through his poems.

As to criticism, this word is so often misunderstood, that the teacher ought to make clear to the pupils, from the beginning, that the true work of the critic of poetry is to find the beauty and the truth in it. What better lesson can there be for the children, or for the teacher himself, than to realize that the critic, whether of poetry or of life itself, has one duty, one ideal, to find the beauty and the truth in it, the heart and the soul of it; that though, at times, he may have to point out faults, he does this through no love of fault-finding, but for love of truth, that the truth, in its beauty, may shine more clearly? The one who loves fault-finding, who delights in pointing out the weakness of others, shows clearly the pettiness of his own spirit: he never reaches the heart of things: he

<sup>1</sup> SHELLEY, *Defence of Poetry*   <sup>2</sup> BROWNING, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*.

is never admitted into the company of the great poets. His one interest is to show that they are men like himself; he looks for himself in them, and finds himself in their weaknesses. But the true critic, striving to realize the beauty and the truth, and putting aside the faults that he may get nearer to the heart of things, lives in the company of the great, and finds himself in their greatness. It is easy to find faults, even in the greatest poets—in Shakespeare and Milton; but who can rise to the heights from which they survey human life? The teacher ought to impress upon the pupils that the measure of their own greatness is what they can find in life, that the measure of their own poetic ability is what they can find in poetry, that, for instance, the child who feels keenly the beauty in Masefield's *Sea Fever* has something of the poet himself in him. Let the teacher take the lesson to himself as a guide in his daily work. How often, for instance, does the correction of compositions degenerate into mere fault-finding, the marking of mistakes, the teacher forgetting that his aim ought to be to encourage and stimulate the young writers by pointing out to them what is good in their work, where they have succeeded! When he has done this, they are eager to correct their own mistakes, as he shows them how these spoil the effect of their own good work. They no longer look upon this as fault-finding. They find that the teacher sees more clearly than they what they aimed at, and can show them how, by avoiding certain faults, they might have come much nearer attaining it.

Thus his correction of composition, by basing itself upon a sympathetic understanding of what the writers aim at, has become true criticism, the teacher himself a true critic.

It will be evident to the student that, if in reading and teaching poetry we are helping our pupils to feel its beauty and its truth, our work is in the true sense criticism. Thus the question as to when criticism should begin is already answered. For more general criticism, in which we attempt to sum up the qualities of a poet's work, I would repeat, in different words, what I have already said about Shakespeare. The pupils will be ready for this when they have read widely in the poet's work. That the pupils should have read, and enjoyed, and, in their own way, criticized the work is the necessary preparation for this criticism.

The reading must be kept far in advance of it, so that the pupils have either already felt what the general criticism will put in form for them, or will find that it reveals new beauty and truth in what they have already read. It comes thus as a confirmation, or an interpretation, of their experience, and has something of the effect of poetry on them: they feel its truth, and it seems to share in the beauty it reveals. When will the pupils be ready for this? That depends upon how poetry is taught in school.

I have often wished that our leaders in education would realize the possibilities of the Elementary School. I have worked with Elementary teachers, and know no better body of people to work with—none readier

to discuss new methods, or more grateful for guidance. But which of us could do the work expected of them, which of us is qualified to take a class in every subject of the curriculum? Already in some combined Higher Grade and Elementary Schools this is being realized, and we find in Art, for instance, the Art Master supervising the work of the Elementary Department. In my own subject I hope for a time when there will be a fully qualified English Master in each large Elementary School, giving his time to the supervision and teaching of the subject, not merely taking the most advanced class, but responsible to the Headmaster for the whole English of the school. Think what might be accomplished in the Elementary Department alone if we had a well-coordinated, well-worked scheme of poetry! The normal child spends seven years in this department. If, on the average, we read to them one new poem per week, we should read about forty poems in the year. One new poem per week is not much to ask. It is quite possible to do all the teaching necessary, to do all that I have suggested in my earlier chapters, and read this number of poems; in fact, we cannot be teaching poetry as we ought without doing so. Thus in the seven years we should read about three hundred poems. It is in things like this that the English Master in the Elementary Department would find his work. If the teacher had no natural gift for poetry he could take the poetry of that class, or at least assist him. If the teacher was fond of poetry he could help to co-ordinate the work, and, by taking an occasional poem,

or talking over with the pupils one they already knew, stimulate their desire for poetry. His chief work in poetry, however, would be to keep a careful eye on the growth of the child's anthology. I have referred to this at different times, and the student may have wondered why I consider it of such importance. Let me illustrate it from the use of words. There are over a hundred thousand words in the English Dictionary. The student will find that he knows only a certain number of these, and that the number he actually uses is a very small proportion indeed. Yet this is the only part of the language that really lives for him: that which serves his needs. As his education advances, his need for language to express himself increases; but it always remains true that the living part of the language is but a small proportion of the words a man knows, and these but a small part of the whole. Let me call this living part of the language his "vocabulary". What we wish to do for our pupils in English is to increase this vocabulary, as upon this depends all ease and exactness of expression. Take, for instance, the use of the adjective *awful* at the present day. The frequency of its use, or rather mis-use, is a proof that our vocabulary is weak in adjectives. People say it is just laziness, but it is more than that. If the one adjective lay as close to hand as the other, laziness would not explain why the other is always taken. It is not a matter of ignorance. We can supply the right adjective if asked. This, however, is the adjective that lives with us to the exclusion of others. In doing

so it has practically lost its original meaning. The teacher of English should see that the correct expressive words live, and should do his best to root out such weeds as this.

Let the student apply this to poetry. He may have read a great deal, and, in this sense, know a great many poems; but the number he actually knows, that he returns to again and again, that serve his daily needs and live with him, is very small. This small number I call his anthology. The better his education in poetry is, the larger will this anthology be. One of the main reasons for condemning examinations in poetry is that they take no heed of the pupil's anthology, but give full marks for mere knowledge of poetry which may be only skin deep. If we indeed believe that poetry is of vital importance in the life of our nation, let us make it a vital thing in the child's education; that is, let us develop the child's anthology by every means we have. The whole reading and teaching of poetry should aim at this. Could we have poems printed on separate leaflets with suitable eyelets, that they might be fitted into a cover, the child might actually gather his own "garland of verse". Think of the interest when, some day, the teacher devotes a whole period to reading new poems, that they may choose any they think worthy to add to their collection! Think of the unconscious development of taste, of critical judgment, of interest in the world of poetry—the joy in finding a new poet, a new style, something fresh yet worthy to be added! Think of it growing for seven years, the

little volume of poems chosen by the boy himself to be his own! If the teacher loves poetry, if he has made an anthology for himself, if, in his reading, the poem comes straight from his heart, if, in his teaching, he leads his pupils through beauty to truth, if—but why continue? There is but one “if”. How often in times of discouragement, when not only I seemed to have failed, but the poetry seemed to have gone out of life, the very ideal to have lost its charm—how often, as the utter condemnation of my weakness, but at the same time, as an inspiration rekindling the fire of life, have the great words rung through my mind, “If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me!”

If the teacher's heart is right he cannot fail. His pupils will leave him with an anthology of poems that will live with them and serve their daily needs. They will remember him in the company of the poets he taught; his voice will ring down the years to them in the words of the poems they love.

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